



# The High Commissioner's Foreword

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*Filippo Grandi visits Syrian families struggling amid the COVID-19 lockdown in Lebanon.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone throughout the world, threatening people's health and livelihoods while compounding challenges for the most vulnerable. While COVID-19 is an unprecedented health crisis, it has also led to a protection crisis and produced a pandemic of poverty, deepening a sense of despair amongst many of the world's forcibly displaced, severely straining their coping mechanisms and exacerbating challenges to mental health.

The pandemic has necessitated a humanitarian response unlike any before, with every UNHCR office in every country where we work impacted. UNHCR colleagues, alongside our humanitarian partners—and in many places, with refugees and other forcibly displaced

people themselves, many of whom stepped up their engagement and commitment to their communities, contributing across the range of the response—stayed and delivered for people of concern, as well as their host communities. We increased our health, water and sanitation responses, developed new and innovative approaches to support education, expanded our cash assistance programmes to mitigate the worst of the socioeconomic impact, and communicated with the vulnerable to ensure they had access to the most up-to-date information on the virus.

As this tumultuous year comes to a close, we look ahead at how to address the challenges of 2021 and beyond. UNHCR will continue to stand up its emergency response to the pandemic and will also

address other related obstacles to refugee protection. We will work with States to find principled and pragmatic solutions to provide international protection and uphold international human rights obligations, including to ensure that any restrictions on movement intended to prevent the spread of the virus imposed on refugees and other displaced populations are temporary and non-discriminatory.

We will expand our efforts to shield refugees and IDPs from the perils of poverty. When employed, the displaced are already more likely to be in informal wage work and in lower quality jobs with little or no access to social safety nets. This has made them more vulnerable to losing their livelihoods during lockdowns and we have seen their already meagre savings quickly wiped out. Levels of extreme poverty amongst refugees have grown, increasing amongst those in Lebanon, for example, from some 55% before the pandemic to 88%. Tens of thousands of other refugees have returned to their countries of origin not out of choice, but rather out of desperation as opportunities to make ends meet in countries of asylum vanished.

Pandemic-related poverty has a particular impact on women and girls. We have seen an increase in gender-based violence, including domestic violence and so-called negative coping strategies like sexual exploitation or early and forced marriage. I thank Special Envoy Angelina Jolie for her efforts to shine a spotlight on girls' education in particular and appeal to all to do more to ensure that resources are available for refugee children to have access and means to study.

UNHCR is distributing cash to the neediest to counter some of these terrible consequences and will continue to do so, but it is clear that humanitarians alone will not be able to meet the growing needs.

We must, therefore, work to ensure that refugees, IDPs and stateless persons are also included in the financial stimulus packages being developed by States with the support of international financial institutions and regional development banks. We have already seen great strides to include refugees in national programmes and systems, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the pledges of support made at the Global Refugee Forum. But much more is needed to sustain the displaced and their hosts and prevent not only much greater humanitarian suffering, but also instability and further displacement.

The COVID-19 pandemic is yet another crisis on top of multiple layers of crisis already faced by the 80 million people forcibly displaced in the world today. As conflict, persecution, and the climate emergency persist, the number of those displaced is set to increase. More than 650,000 people have been displaced in the central Sahel this year alone, most within their own countries. Hundreds of thousands have been forced from their homes by violence in northern Mozambique. Nicaraguans continue to flee a grave situation. Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh continues to affect civilians. And other crises, such as those in Afghanistan, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and that facing the Rohingya, remain protracted. These men, women and children cannot be forgotten and we cannot allow the pandemic to distract from meeting their other needs while searching for solutions to their plight.

We will also seek to make progress in other areas, including strengthening our response to situations of internal displacement, eradicating statelessness, and preventing, mitigating and responding to climate-related displacement—an area where UNHCR has stepped up its important work using the

latest technologies including artificial intelligence and predictive analytics to improve humanitarian and development responses.

Despite the global challenges, UNHCR continues to press for solutions to forced exile. We are working with countries to develop and implement tripartite arrangements for voluntary, safe and dignified returns when possible; encouraging local integration where relevant; and pressing for an increase in resettlement places and complementary pathways for admission to third countries for those in need. The support platforms envisaged in the Global Compact on Refugees have been key in helping facilitate regional approaches to refugee crises in support of countries of asylum, as well as in helping build conditions and absorption capacity for returnees in countries of origin.

To this end, we welcome the decision by the Governments of South Sudan and Sudan, along with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and UNHCR and with the support of the European Commission, to develop and implement an initiative to find solutions for the nearly 7 million uprooted Sudanese and South Sudanese. This will be a major area of focus for UNHCR in 2021 and beyond and the two countries have our full support in bringing an end to the protracted plight of their citizens. Other support platforms, such as in Latin America and for Afghan refugees, also deserve full support.

COVID-19 brought new challenges and opportunities to the environment in which States, UNHCR and its partners operate, but has also accelerated thinking or initiatives already underway. UNHCR's transformation and reforms will continue and regionalization and decentralization have already proved their worth in enabling the response to the pandemic. Reforming our

results-based management system remains a key priority, as is the simplification of business processes and delegating relevant authority to those best placed to deliver.

After 70 years on the front lines of all major displacement crises, one thing is clear to UNHCR. No matter the strength of our emergency response, our support to the displaced and their host communities, and our solutions work, unless the international community overcomes its differences and makes peace rather than fomenting further conflict, the number of displaced will not diminish significantly. I therefore appeal, yet again, to all UN Member States—especially those with the heavy responsibility that membership on the Security Council entails—to do more to prevent and end conflicts.

In the meantime, I appeal in the strongest terms for those with means to continue to support the humanitarian response around the world. COVID-19 has put enormous pressure on all stakeholders' budgets, but now is not the time for donor retrenchment. Resources are needed to continue to prevent and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 for the most vulnerable, including those of concern to UNHCR. Now is the time to demonstrate international solidarity, to maintain social cohesion, to save lives, reduce suffering, improve conditions and expand opportunities for refugees, IDPs, stateless persons and their hosts, so that they can realize their potential.



—Filippo Grandi  
UNHCR High Commissioner



## Message from the Special Envoy

Angelina Jolie, the UNHCR Special Envoy, shares the pride of Hassan in his 10-year-old daughter, Sora. Despite the difficulties of living in the ruins of Mosul, Iraq, Sora is top of her class.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

There have been many attempts to put a price on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the damage caused to children's education is almost impossible to quantify.

In my years with UNHCR, I have met shocking numbers of children whose education suffered because of conflict. Children who lost the little reading and writing skills they had. Whose education went into reverse. Whose dreams got progressively smaller.

Depriving a child of their education strips them of their most effective protection against poverty, inequality, early forced marriage, violence and mistreatment. If you were a refugee child before the pandemic, you were already twice as likely to be out of school than other children.

COVID-19 has had an impact on education equivalent in some respects to the impact of war, exposing many children to significant danger, including the danger of physical abuse in the home. We know from previous pandemics that many children—particularly girls—fall out of education altogether. There is a significant risk that half of all girls currently enrolled in secondary school will never go back to school at all.

There is no more important measure we can take to protect children globally during the pandemic than to protect their education and help them return to the classroom.

There is no one solution that will fit all settings. There are amazing new technologies available to support distance learning. Yet many children do not have access to television or radio, let alone a laptop or an internet connection. There is a very real digital divide within, as well as between, countries.

We also have to consider the needs of children with disabilities or with other protection concerns; the part that hunger plays in damaging children's ability to learn; the need to support teachers and strengthen curricula; and many, many other issues.

If we choose not to give this support, this will inflict harm on the most vulnerable and important members of our societies and our world. Failing to act deprives children of their right to an education and the chance to develop their personalities, their minds and their talents.

For as much as I began by describing the tragic consequences of a loss of education through force of circumstances, I have also seen the opposite: children who succeed in their studies taking their classes in the open air, without a schoolroom, and with little more than a single schoolbook between them; and refugees who go on to achieve extraordinary success in every walk of life, including those serving as doctors and nurses in the frontline of the COVID-19 response today.

COVID-19 is proving to be an incredible catalyst for science, discovery and innovation. If we could do the same for education, this would be one of the greatest single inoculations imaginable against poverty and the denial of rights worldwide.

For children whose education and future lies in the balance at this time, our job is to do everything we can to tip the balance decisively in their favour. There is no better investment we can make.



—Angelina Jolie  
UNHCR's Special Envoy

# UNHCR in 2021

COVID-19 has demonstrated that pandemics, like the climate emergency, poverty and inequality, and conflicts and forced displacement, require a collective effort to respond and to support those affected.

UNHCR remains on the ground, working on behalf of people of concern around the world.

But despite decades of experience, the coronavirus emergency has been unlike any seen throughout UNHCR's 70-year history. Never has every UNHCR office and operation faced a crisis of this magnitude—all at the same time.

## Mission

The High Commissioner for Refugees is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. As of October 2020, 149 States are parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or to its 1967 Protocol.

UNHCR's primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. In its efforts to achieve this objective, the Office strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, and to return home voluntarily. By assisting refugees to return to their own country or to settle permanently in another country, UNHCR also seeks lasting solutions to their plight.

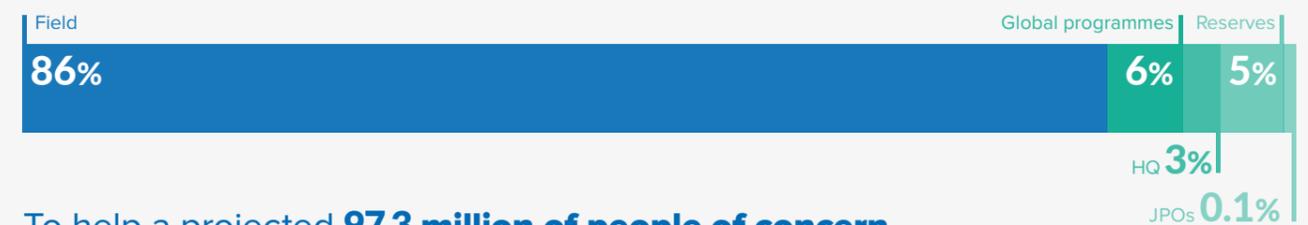
UNHCR's Executive Committee (106 Member States as of October 2020) and the UN General Assembly have authorized involvement with other groups. These include former refugees who have returned to their homeland, internally displaced people, and persons

who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed. As of October 2020, 94 States are parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 75 to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

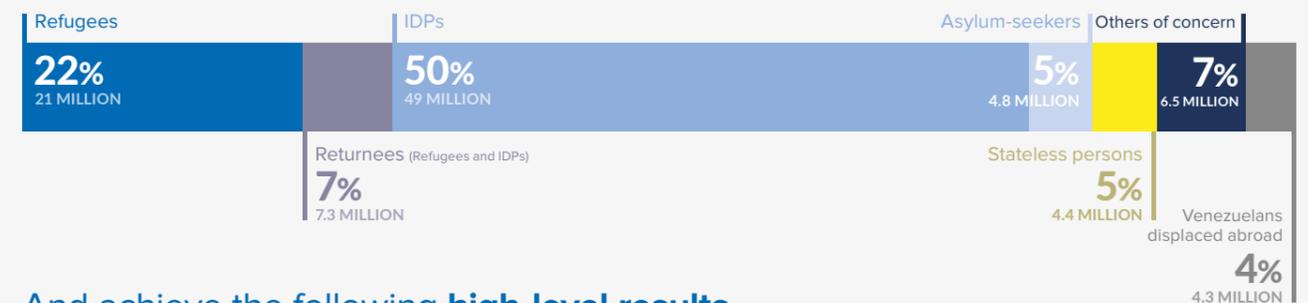
The Office seeks to reduce situations of forced displacement by encouraging States and other institutions to create conditions which are conducive to the protection of human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes. In all of its activities, it pays particular attention to the needs of children and seeks to promote the equal rights of women and girls.

The Office carries out its work in collaboration with many partners, including governments, regional organizations, and international and non-governmental organizations. It is committed to the principle of participation, believing that refugees and others who benefit from the Office's activities should be consulted over decisions which affect their lives.

To fulfill its mandated responsibilities, UNHCR needs **\$8.616 billion**



To help a projected **97.3 million of people of concern**



And achieve the following **high-level results**

### Safeguard fundamental rights



#### Registration

19 million individual records will be registered in UNHCR's population registration and identity management ecosystem (PRIMES).



#### Child protection

70% or more of unaccompanied or separated children will have a best interests process initiated or completed.



#### Statelessness

90,000 stateless persons will be supported to acquire a nationality, or have it confirmed.



#### Community-based protection

85% of UNHCR operations will have functioning complaints and feedback mechanisms in place, including in the context of responses to COVID-19.

### Respond with life-saving support



#### Health

(including mental health and psychosocial support)

40% of refugee-hosting countries with national health insurance schemes will include refugees on the same basis as nationals.

180,000 consultations will be provided for mental, neurological and substance use conditions in refugee health facilities.



#### Cash assistance

\$700 million in cash assistance will be provided to people of concern across 95 operations.



#### Shelter and settlement

An estimated 4.75 million people of concern will be targeted with shelter assistance in 2021.



#### Water, hygiene and sanitation

45% of people of concern will have access to at least 20 litres of safe water per day.

### Build better futures



#### Education

2 million children will be enrolled in primary education.

500,000 refugee children and youth will be supported with distance or home-based learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



#### Resettlement

80,000 refugees will be resettled through UNHCR.



#### Energy and environmental protection

2.9 million refugees and other people of concern will have access to sustainable sources of electricity.



#### Livelihoods and economic inclusion

50% of people of concern aged 15 or older will hold a basic financial account (a mobile money account or an account with a financial institution).